

Opinion Exchange

STARTRIBUNE.COM/OPINION • SUNDAY, OCTOBER 21, 2007 • SECTION OP

Garbage out: The coming political-ad wars

This is going to be ugly. And in the age of the Internet, it's an ugliness available to all.

By CHUCK KELLY

It's coming. At the turn of the year, as we dive headfirst into primaries season, you won't have time to grab the remote as an unprecedented tidal wave of political advertising crashes over us.

Worse still, the marketing dollars are going to be just as scary as the fight. Early estimates put the total political-ad expenditure in the run-up to the presidential election at a record-busting \$3 billion.

One reason campaigns spend so much on advertising is that their creative product is terrible. All advertising preys on our emotions, but political advertising loves to hate. Night after night, day after day, we hear how bad one candidate after another is. No wonder there is so much cynicism in our government.

When an ad isn't talking smack about an opponent, it's perpetrating the unimaginable: the scene where the politico smiles and waves to us with his loving, supportive family from the homestead. Any marketer in the real world would be justly fired for approving such work.

Chuck Kelly is president of Kerker, an ad agency in Minneapolis.

This is all nuts. No marketer worth his or her salt would ever look at a collective \$3 billion ad spend with only one winner as a strong return on investment. No client trying to build brand share would ever green-light the kind of creative nonsense we're about to see. But still it comes.

So what exactly should we expect? What showstopping gems can we count on to break up "Grey's Anatomy" and "Heroes"?

We're going to see the political equivalent of ultimate fighting. With no incumbent running and no vice president angling for the job, there's a big, open playing field that's likely to get very messy. Unfortunately, that mess is going to land on us, no matter how far back from our TV and computer screens we sit.

While that is irritating news for anyone without TiVo, it's actually a real business issue for regular marketers. An open presidential race means a slurry of weak, annoying or even numbing ads.

Kelly continues: Letting loose on YouTube, an unregulated venue. **OP2 ▶**

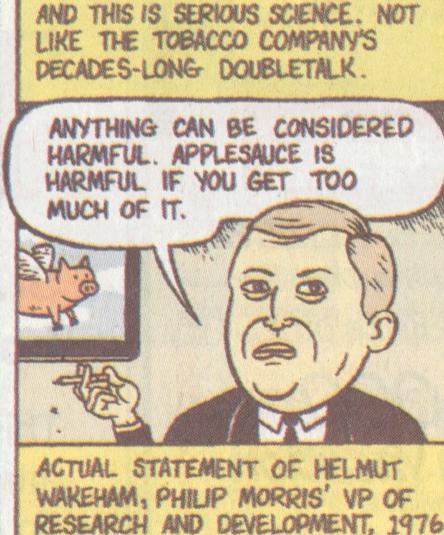
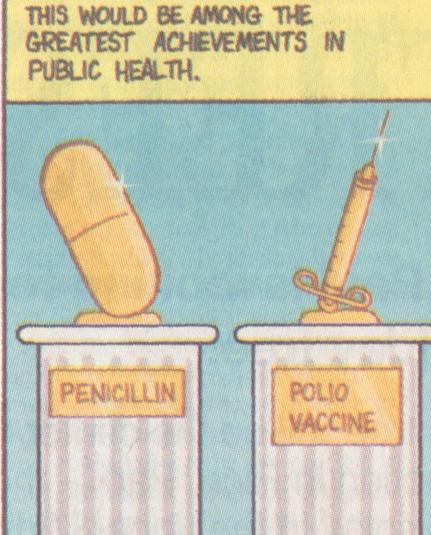
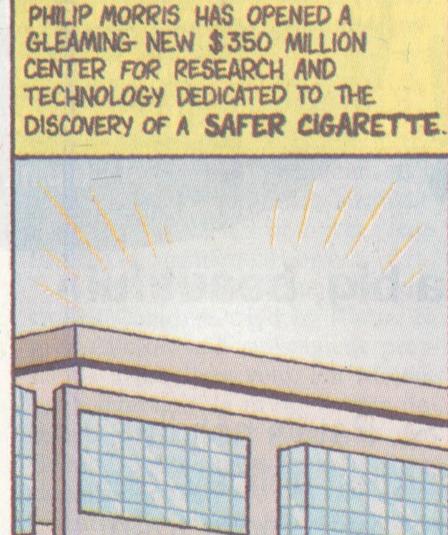


A video available at YouTube morphs Apple's famed "1984" ad into a statement about Hillary Clinton, with a not-so-subtle plug for Barack Obama at the end.

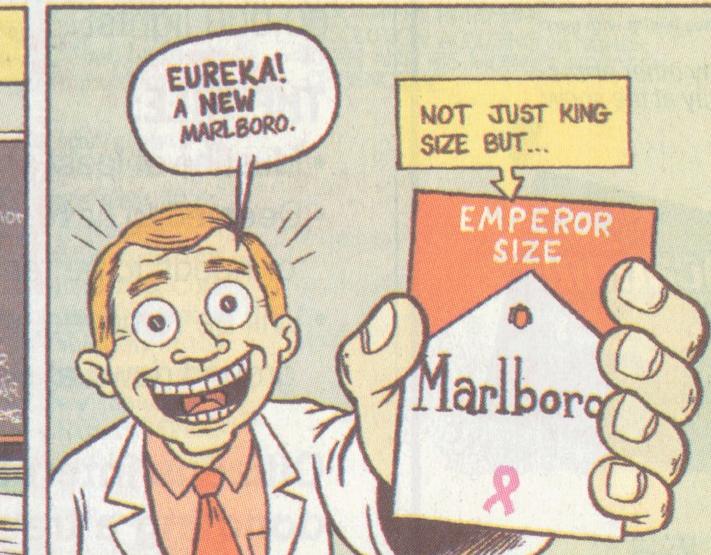
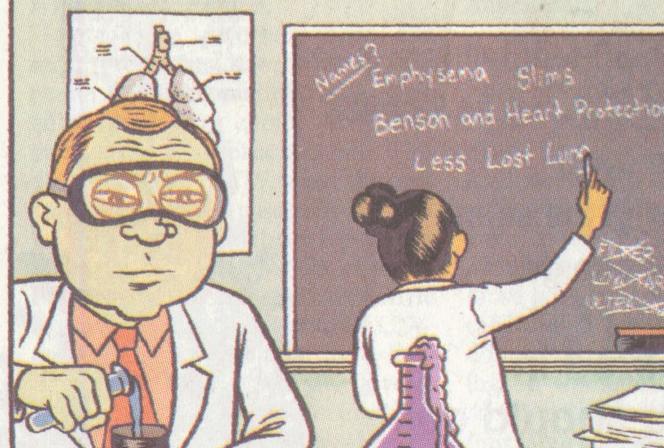
SMOKE 'EM IF YOU SEE 'EM

This week in Minneapolis, 3,000 public-health experts will attend the biennial National Conference on Tobacco or Health. Since the release of the landmark 1964 Surgeon General's report, considerable progress has been made in reducing the prevalence of smoking among adults — from more than 40 percent to 21 percent (20 percent in Minnesota) — through educational campaigns in the mass media and through the passage of clean-indoor-air laws (the first of which was authored by Minnesota state Rep. Phyllis Kahn in 1975). Yet nearly 50 million Americans still smoke, and cigarettes remain the leading preventable cause of lung cancer, heart disease and emphysema. Most worrisome is that the decline in smoking among high-school students has leveled off at 22 percent. One wrenching controversy that attendees at this week's conference will debate is whether the tobacco industry is indeed on the wane or is still up to its old tricks. Dr. Alan Blum, director of the University of Alabama Center for the Study of Tobacco and Society, teamed up with cartoonist Matt Bors to create this view of one company's attempt to soften its image. □

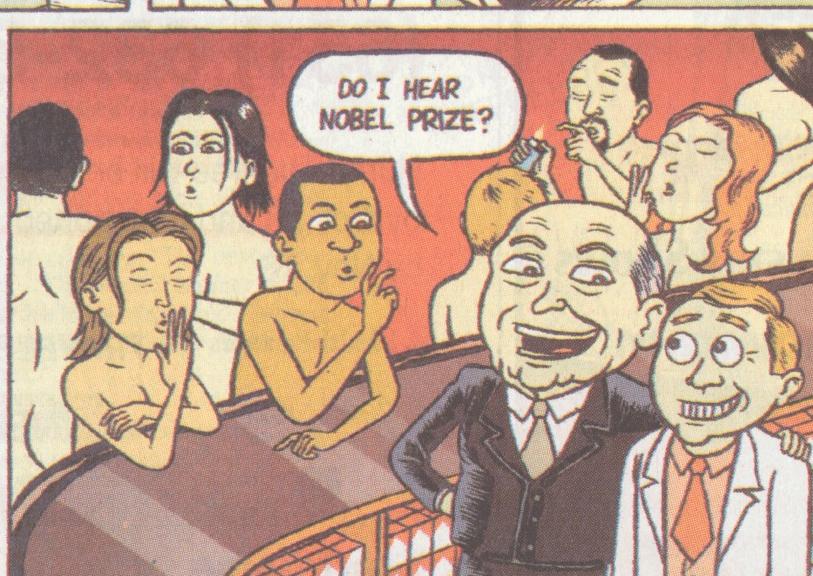
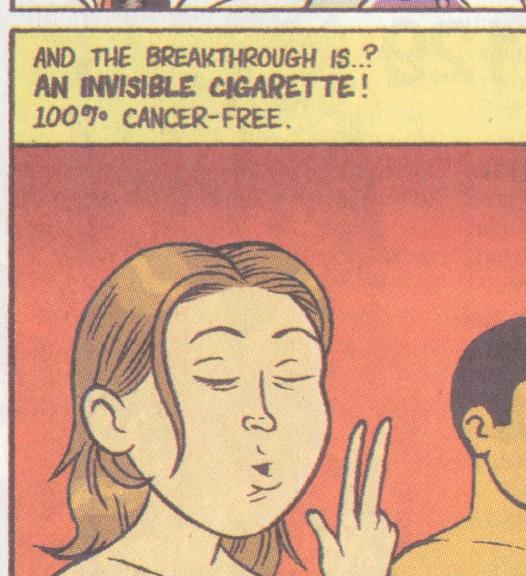
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500 RESEARCHERS ARE BEING HIRED FOR THIS LIFE-SAVING PROJECT.



AND THE BREAKTHROUGH IS... AN INVISIBLE CIGARETTE! 100% CANCER-FREE.



Dr. Alan Blum can be reached at ablum@cchs.ua.edu.

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WITH WATER IN MIND
AN OCCASIONAL SERIES

Are we about to backslide on public health?

- Unfortunately, on the 35th anniversary of the Clean Water Act, it's a real risk.

By JOHN DINGELL and JAMES OBERSTAR

Before 1972, raw sewage and poisonous industrial waste were routinely dumped into our rivers and streams. Before 1972, urban rivers posed a fire hazard to their surrounding cities. Before 1972, the Great Lakes were dying. Before 1972, wetlands were being drained and filled without consideration of the repercussions.

Then came the Clean Water Act.

Thursday marked the 35th anniversary of one of the most effective, meaningful laws ever enacted. When it was approved by Congress in 1972, the Clean Water Act was a visionary effort to improve water quality across the nation.

Over the past 35 years, the act has demonstrated the success of a federal-state partnership that finds practical solutions for improving and protecting the nation's water supplies and protecting our wetlands. It established the authority for the Environmental Protection Agency to set a uniform baseline for the protection of waters that individual states can build upon to meet local needs. This federal baseline eliminated interstate conflicts that arose when an upstream state chose not to protect its waters and downstream states had little recourse. The act's effectiveness is readily measurable: The number of rivers, lakes and bays that are safe enough for fishing and swimming has doubled since 1972. In addition, the loss rate of wetlands, which serve several useful functions, including providing flood control and habitat for wildlife, has slowed significantly.

Although we have made enormous strides since the statute's enactment, efforts to clean up America's waters have stalled — even slipped — under the stewardship of the Bush administration.

Water continues: What the original act intended, and new legislative action for today. **OP2 ▶**
Editorial: The mighty troubled Mississippi. **OP4 ▶**



ABOUT THIS SERIES

"With Water in Mind" is a long-term project by the Star Tribune's editorial page staff and online staff. Previously published articles and other features have been collected at startribune.com/water.

John Dingell, D-Mich., and James Oberstar, D-Minn., are members of the U.S. House of Representatives. Both men were involved in the drafting or passage of the Clean Water Act.

INSIDE

A line-item veto? Be careful what you wish for.
George F. Will, OP5

Finding grace in an old church in Baltimore.
Garrison Keillor, OP5